



DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

Walter H. Boyd, Press Officer
Wm. Drew Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400

80248

July 24, 1980

FUTURE HOLDS PROMISE FOR SOUTH INDIA CHURCH

NEW YORK -- "We are growing, experimenting in new ministries, practicing ecumenism at every level and supporting most of our pastoral ministry with local funds," said here the Rev. P. Victor PremaSagar, the new General Secretary of the Church of South India in an interview with staff officers for World Mission in Church and Society at the Episcopal Church Center.

The Church of South India was inaugurated in 1947 by the union of four Anglican dioceses of the then Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon, the larger part of the United Church of South India (Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed) and the Methodist Church of British origin.

"The conversations took us almost 20 years but at last we were able to produce a united body better equipped for evangelism and witness," said Dr. PremaSagar.


At the present time the Church of South India has over two million members grouped in 22 dioceses and served by almost 2,000 clergy. With the departure of the last English bishop in March of this year, all the dioceses are under Indian bishops.

A former principle of a theological college, Dr. PremaSagar, 53, is currently visiting the United States where he will deliver five lectures on ecumenical theology, and the mission of the church at Concordia College, a Lutheran institution at Moorehead, Minn.

The Indian church leader said that a great part of pastoral work of the Church in South India is done by local lay leaders. "There are places where the people receive the sacraments of the Lord's Supper only over great intervals because of transportation problems of the clergy," he said.

He pointed out that many of these congregations are flourishing because of the ministry and witness of the lay people. "These are patterns of ministry that are becoming more and more common in our own situation," he said, and added that a problem is how to train people in non-traditional methods.

-more-



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

The last synod of the Church of South India approved the ordination of women to the priesthood, but now two-thirds of the dioceses must ratify this decision. Dr. PremaSagar said that there are a number of women preparing themselves for the ministry who hope to be ordained in the near future. The final vote on this issue will be taken in the 1982 synod.

"Even when we have accomplished a great ecumenical task by uniting different ecclesiastical traditions, our goal is not fulfilled," said Dr. PremaSagar. He added that the Church of South India is in reunion talks with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, and the Church of North India. These three churches have already declared their intention to become the Church of India. The Lutheran Church, also part of the dialogue, has agreed to statements on theology and the constitution of the United Church but has not yet entered into the union scheme.

Dr. PremaSagar told the staff that the proposed Freedom of Religion Bill has been eliminated with the dissolution of the Parliament late last year. The bill would have specified prison terms for those proselytizing others through fraud or incentives. "Although we do not engage in this kind of practice," said Dr. PremaSagar, "this law would have imperiled seriously our evangelistic outreach program."

The Christians in India number approximately 18 million or 2.6 percent of the total population of 700 million people.

Dr. PremaSagar said that the Church of South India is now in a better position to enter into partnership with other churches around the world. He pointed out that a significant step in that direction was the recent participation of the Moderator of the Church of South India, the Most Rev. Solomon Doraiswamy, in the Partners in Mission Consultation of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.

"We want to share our experience with other churches like the Episcopal Church in the United States," he said, "not because we believe that our role is unique, but because we have yet much to learn from others."

#

DP, DX

